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Letter dated 20 August 2007 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the Nanjing Statement on Interfaith Dialogue adopted at the Third Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Interfaith Dialogue held in Nanjing, China, from 19 to 21 June 2007 (see annex).

It would be greatly appreciated if the present letter and its annex were circulated as a document of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly under item 51 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) **Wang** Guangya
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and Permanent Representative of
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Annex to the letter dated 20 August 2007 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English]

Nanjing Statement on Interfaith Dialogue

(Nanjing, China, 19-21 June 2007)

1. We, the representatives of ASEM partners, reflecting various cultural, religious, and faith heritages, gathered in Nanjing, China on 19-21 June 2007 at the Third ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, co-hosted by the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Italy and co-sponsored by Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Thailand and UK, reached agreement on the following understanding and actions to be taken for furthering the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.

2. We were encouraged by the recognition ASEM leaders gave to the Interfaith Dialogue, by underscoring in the *Chair's Statement of the Sixth ASEM Summit* 'the importance of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in contributing to the creation and reinforcement of an environment conducive to building harmony and understanding within the international community'.

3. We welcomed the convening of the Interfaith Dialogue as an annual ASEM event and, reaffirming the *Bali Declaration* and the *Larnaca Action Plan*, noted with satisfaction the progress made since the first two Dialogue meetings. We reaffirmed our commitment to deepening and broadening the Interfaith Dialogue process, a significant dimension of Asia-Europe relationship, and to building a peaceful and harmonious partnership between the two.

4. Under the theme of 'Deepening Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, Development and Harmony', we recognized the positive role of dialogue among faiths, especially in enhancing mutual understanding and respect through equal and friendly interaction among cultures and religions; promoting and protecting human rights; promoting respect for human dignity, equality, equity, justice, freedom of religion or belief, social inclusion and integration, inclusiveness and genuine brotherhood; addressing global challenges; better protecting cultural

diversity and respecting cultural and faith heritage; and promoting peace, development and harmony.

5. We reiterated the important role of media in promoting tolerance, peace and justice, respect for human dignity, harmony, interfaith and intercultural understanding, social cohesion and responsibility as well as in translating and disseminating the shared values of peace among cultures and religions into practical actions within the community.

6. We recognized the valuable contribution of mutually inclusive, reinforcing and interrelated initiatives and their results at the national, regional and international level to promote intercivilization, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, inter alia, the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, and the UN General Assembly Resolutions on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue for peace, cooperation and understanding. In particular, we welcomed the role of the UN sponsored Alliance of Civilizations as a global effort for bridging the divide between cultures, societies and faiths, and the adoption of practical measures in the fields of youth, media, education and migration through its Plan of Action.

I. Interfaith Dialogue and Globalization

7. We recognized the fact that globalization in all its aspects and advancement of science and technology has resulted in greater interaction among peoples and faiths, bringing about both opportunities and challenges in a more interlinked and interdependent world. We recognized that respect for religious and cultural diversity in an increasingly globalizing world enriches national identity, contributes to regional and international cooperation, promotes enhanced dialogue among civilizations and helps create an environment conducive to the exchange of human experience and to the promotion of human rights and human dignity.

8. We noted that threats such as poverty and under-development, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, transnational organized crime, natural disasters, terrorism, infectious diseases and environment degradation, also challenge the global community today and threaten our common survival. We emphasized that such global challenges can be met with the positive support of religions and interfaith dialogue.

9. We recognized that the plurality and diversity of languages, cultures, philosophies, faiths and religions are part of the great heritage and historical identity of ASEM countries. We called on ASEM partners to respect freedom of religion or belief, diversity in social system, path of development and culture and oppose all forms of intolerance, exclusion, xenophobia or racism so that cultural, ethnic, social and religious diversities shall not lead to conflict but rather peaceful coexistence.

10. We recognized that imbalanced development and uneven benefits as challenges of globalization and encouraged faith communities to strengthen cooperation in response to the challenges facing humanity, overcome social conflicts, in particular those linked with urbanization, address the gap between the North and the South, working towards mutual benefit for all.

11. Noting that globalization also poses challenge to preserving and protecting faiths and cultural heritage and traditions, we emphasized the need to enrich globalization with commonly shared values.

II. Interfaith Dialogue and Peace

12. We renewed our commitment to peace, calling for the peaceful and harmonious co-existence of faiths and cultures and respect for human rights and dignity. We appealed to facilitate the participation and contributions of representatives of various faiths and religions, when appropriate, in the prevention of conflicts and in peace initiatives. We also stressed the importance of giving value to international knowledge of best practice in the building, maintenance and strengthening of peace through dialogue, mediation and negotiation in which representatives of various faiths and religions participate.

13. We reaffirmed our commitment to oppose extremism, to contribute to the peaceful settlement of conflicts and to prevent and combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We also reiterated our determination to prevent and reject stereotyping of national religious or ethnic groups in association with terrorism, while, inter alia, empowering the moderates and promoting genuine brotherhood. We condemned the use of violence in the name of religions, faiths or ideologies not only within our communities but also in the world at large. We also condemned the instrumental use of symbols and religious, cultural or ethnical values to generating conflicts, to feeding wars or to justifying terrorism.

14. We recognized that all cultures and religions share a common set of universal values and can all play a unique and positive role in promoting world peace and human progress. We emphasized the need, at all levels of society and among religious communities in Asia and Europe, to double efforts in searching for and teaching common ethics that are conducive to the peaceful co-existence of different cultural and religious groups.

15. In search for more effective and result oriented actions to promote peace through interfaith dialogues, we recommended ASEM partners to examine the following ideas: to further strengthen interfaith dialogues at local, national, regional and international levels and to promote intra-faith dialogues; to endeavor to constantly widen the scope of the interfaith dialogue as inclusive as possible by reaching out to all sectors of the civil society; to hold joint meetings between interfaith dialogue participants and security dialogue participants, possibly in the context of ASEM counter terrorism meetings; to call on religious communities to play effective roles in conflict prevention and resolution, fostering justice, peace building and sustainable development and to educate their members on common responsibilities to advance shared security.

III. Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion and Development

16. We underlined the contributions of interfaith dialogue to social cohesion and common development, as well as the need to create more possibilities and favourable conditions for deepening interfaith and intercultural dialogue, especially at the grassroots level. In this regard, we reaffirmed the importance of an enabling national environment of understanding and mutual respect in which all people, be they religious or non-religious, shall be living in peace, practise and communicate their faiths and convictions.

17. We reaffirmed the importance of eradicating poverty and promoting sustained economic growth, sustainable development and common prosperity bearing in mind the spirit of economic solidarity, and reiterated the determination to ensure the timely and full realization of the Millennium Development Goals. We underlined the valuable role faiths can play in achieving these goals, for instance, by pointing to the moral dimension of the debt burden of developing countries and insisting on a just solution to alleviating this burden. We also emphasized the need to give value to the engagement of faiths in the global effort to protect the environment and respect Nature.

18. We called on ASEM partners to prevent and combat discrimination based on ethnic, cultural or religious grounds, in a spirit of tolerance and dialogue and to create conditions that foster integration, harmonious coexistence, mutual respect and equality between different religions and cultures.

19. We underscored migrants' important contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of recipient countries. We called for the adoption of comprehensive and effective management policies to help legal migrants while respecting and preserving as much as possible their original faith and cultural traditions so as to promote social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

20. We reaffirmed ASEM partners' resolution to promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination through comprehensive policies and tapping the potential of religious and faith groups. We underlined the need to encourage the increase of the number of women participating in the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.

IV. Interfaith Dialogue and the Promotion of Cultural and Educational Cooperation

21. We stressed the important role cultural exchanges and educational cooperation can play in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. We called on ASEM members to engage in more cultural exchanges and educational cooperation to provide the people, especially the youth, with opportunities to acquire knowledge of and respect for different civilizations, cultures and religions, so as to enhance their understanding of common ethical values. We encouraged partners to advance research in faiths and cultures from a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary perspective, as well as carry out academic exchanges. In this regard, we welcomed the reports of the Working Groups on, "Education and Religion" and "Media and Religion" that were organized in 2007 in Budapest by the Republic of Cyprus as part of the implementation of the *Larnaca Action Plan*.

22. We encouraged ASEM partners to consider acceding to, ratifying and implementing the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, aims and principles of which could contribute to promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding.

23. We recognized the important role teachers of religion play in creating the conditions for interfaith dialogue and invited ASEM/ASEF

to consider organizing international conferences for such teachers of different religions to meet and discuss with one another.

24. We called upon ASEM partners to promote and encourage the use of interfaith websites similar to those of ASEM/ASEF, to encourage the study and sharing of best practices in interfaith understanding at the grassroots and cultural levels, and to foster and facilitate interfaith dialogue in their respective countries through education and art giving due consideration to the individual partners' educational system and the various religious practices.

25. We underlined the importance of facilitating and encouraging interaction and exchanges among all individuals, intellectuals and artists of various societies and religions. We encouraged the promotion of mutual visits and meetings of experts from different faiths and cultures in Asia and Europe, which provide opportunities for discovering commonalities among various cultures and religions.

26. We also recognized the role played by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in promoting intercultural exchanges. In particular, we welcomed the Fifth ASEF Journalists' Colloquium that was held back to back with this Dialogue and the 1st Asia-Europe Youth Interfaith Dialogue in Javier, Spain in November 2006, which highlighted the key role of media and youth in the promotion of peaceful interfaith relations. We requested ASEF to continue engaging in cultural and educational activities within the framework of interfaith dialogue.

V. The Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue

27. We welcomed the offer of the Netherlands to host, together with Thailand, the Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in the first week of June 2008 in Amsterdam and looked forward to building on the good momentum of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.